

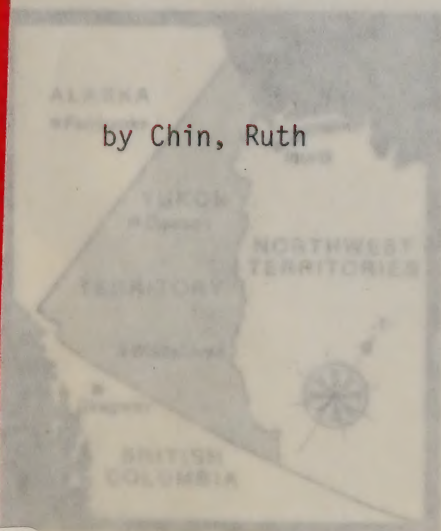
Yukon

TERRITORY

Travel, 1977

YUKON TERRITORY

Story and Photo by
RUTH CHIN



by Chin, Ruth

The Yukon Territory, situated in the northwest 46 states of the United States, is the largest and most remote of the Canadian provinces. Within the 200,000 square miles of land, there are 100,000 square miles of clear lakes, rugged mountains, and some of the highest in Canada, and the most beautiful scenery in the world.

The shape of the Yukon Territory resembles a right triangle, with the long side along the border with the United States, the perpendicular side along the border with the Northwest Territories, and the hypotenuse along the border with the Yukon Territory. The Yukon Territory is a vast, rugged, and beautiful land, with a rich history and a unique culture.

The population of the Yukon Territory is about 20,000 people, with a high percentage of the population being of European descent. The Yukon Territory is a vast, rugged, and beautiful land, with a rich history and a unique culture. The Yukon Territory is a vast, rugged, and beautiful land, with a rich history and a unique culture.

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TRAVEL, JULY, 1977

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Travel, 1897

YUKON TERRITORY

by Chas. Smith

Yukon TERRITORY

The Yukon Territory separates the contiguous 48 states of the United States from the forty-ninth state: Alaska. (British Columbia is also between Alaska and the remaining 48 states). Within the 207,076 square miles (536,327 km²) of this vast, sub-Arctic region are clear lakes, rugged mountains (of which Mt. Logan is the highest in Canada), natural resources, thriving wildlife and pure air.

The shape of the Yukon Territory resembles a right triangle, with the base resting on British Columbia's north border, the perpendicular adjacent to Alaska, and the hypotenuse forming the western boundary of the Northwest Territories' Mackenzie Mountains Preserve. Most of the region is muskeg, tundra, forests, and permafrost with a few, small towns miles from each other.

The population of this territory is only about 22,000 people, outnumbered by the population of wild animals—black bear, moose, dall sheep, caribou, mountain goat, and brown bear. While the animals forage for food, the people make their living by mining, construction, rail-roading, shopkeeping, teaching, and professional services.

Unlike the ten Canadian Provinces, the Yukon Territory, like the Northwest Territories, is administered by a Commissioner appointed by the federal government in Ottawa. The appointed official and an elected Territorial Council serve in the Territorial capital of Whitehorse, which became the seat of the government in 1953.

We had driven our camper to Alaska ten years ago over the rough, dusty, winding 1,523-mile (2,450 km) Alaska Highway, sometimes called the "Alcan." We discovered that driving is the only way to see the beauty of this place unfold mile after mile.

We used the MILEPOST, a travel guide published annually describing in detail the routes in Alaska, the Yukon, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and Alberta, by road, ship and air. For travelers going to the Northlands, the guide lists places to stay, see, and just about anything a visitor might need to know. The guide costs \$5.95, and may be obtained from MILEPOST, Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., Box 4-EEE, Anchorage, Alaska, 99509.

The Yukon seems to be a fascinating, yet ignored land, due partly to the isolation of its people, its cold climate and possibly because the territory is still frontier country. It has an ancient migration history of people and animals crossing a once existing land bridge from Asia. Most of the legend

Story and Photos by
RUTH CHIN



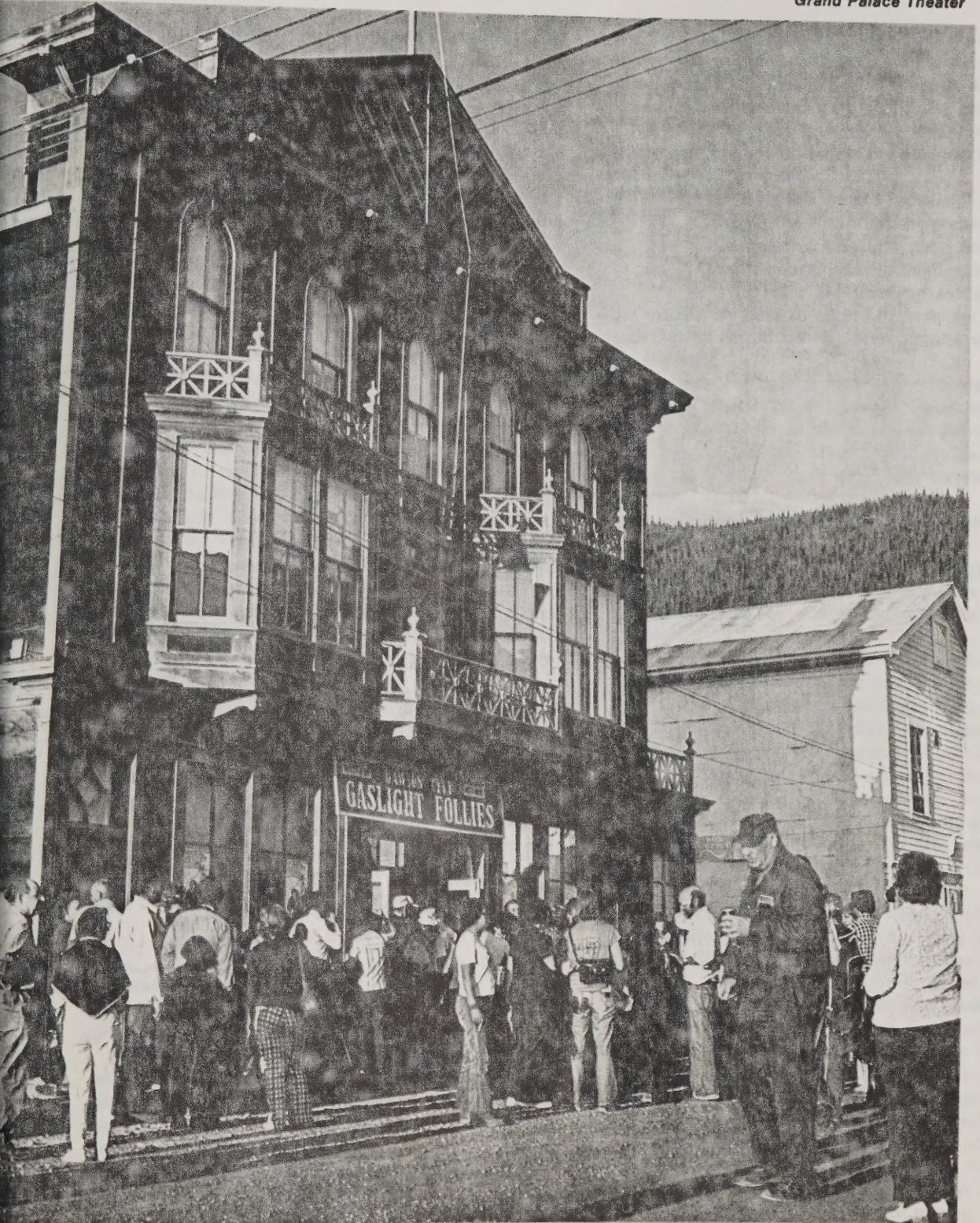
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TRAVEL, JULY, 1977

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*An evening performance
at Dawson City's
Grand Palace Theater*



of the Yukon begins with the discovery of gold in the late 1800s.

One of the first white men to set foot on Yukon soil, the British explorer, Sir John Franklin, came in 1825. He had learned that the Russians were trading for fur with the Indians on the western border. He informed the Hudson Bay Company of the fur trading and they sent John Bell, explorer and trader to reach and name the great river the Indians called the "Youcon."

The influence of the Hudson Bay Company can be traced over three hundred years in the development of the northwestern part of the continent. It has been trading with the Indians and Eskimos since its founding, in the Seventeenth Century as well as with tourists in more recent years.

Robert Campbell, the chief trader for the company built Fort Frances in 1842, the first white settlement in the Yukon. Hostile Indians burned it to the ground soon after its construction.

The Alaska Highway begins with "Mile 0" at Dawson Creek, British Columbia, (not to be confused with Dawson City, Yukon Territory) and zig-zags northwest through the Yukon to Fairbanks, Alaska. The Yukon route is dotted with abandoned log huts which miners used for shelter from the elements and wildlife. Some of these huts look as if they had just been vacated: remnants of the miners' daily lives, such as old stoves, beds, and even moth-eaten fur coats, still can be seen.

The construction of the "Alcan" was a joint project of the American and Canadian armed forces within the year of 1942. Its crooked route was intentionally planned so as not to be an easy target for the enemy. The road was used to transport supplies during World War II. Today it serves as the lifeline to the North, and is a major factor in the two nations' quest for new energy sources.

On the outskirts of Watson Lake, the town just over the British Columbia-Yukon border, is a "sign forest" started in 1942 by a homesick GI who erected a sign stating the mileage to his hometown. Hundreds of signs from all over the U.S. and Canada were added and are now photographed by all who pass by.

Here we realized that the Alcan Highway had been widened and straightened since our previous trip. The gravel road was more firm from the pressure of the heavier traffic of the constant stream of trucks to and from the Alaska pipeline project.

At Watson Lake we chose the Robert Campbell Highway to go by way of the Klondike Loop, taking us past the Takhini Hot Springs to Dawson City, and then to Fairbanks. This route is north of the Alaska Highway and is less traveled. Between the towns of

Watson Lake and Ross River there are no commercial services of any kind. Motorists should have sufficient gasoline for 231 miles (372 km). They should also carry extra tires and maintenance tools for any emergencies.

Northwest of Ross River is the settlement of Faro where gasoline should be obtained to reach Carmacks 110 miles (177 km) away.

The 364-mile (586 km) route isn't as well traveled as the Alcan but the scenery is just as breathtaking. Fishing is good here for grayling, lake trout, and northern pike. Hundreds of little tarns or lakes are scattered along the route but usually are hard to approach from the road. Now and then a moose can be seen sipping water along the shoreline.

A government ferry at Ross River provides access to the North Canol Road (summer travel only) which leads to the border of the Northwest Territories. This road has no facilities. The official Yukon map also shows some other roads which are traveled in summer only.

Historical sites are well marked along the route. We stopped to view the Five Fingers Rapids, a series of five channels requiring considerable navigational skill of the pilots of the old river sternwheelers which had to be winched by cables through the narrowest channels.

The first discovery of gold in 1884 in the Fortymile River put the Yukon "on the map." A boundary dispute at the Alaska-Yukon border was squelched by the Northwest Mounted Police. In August 1896, a "good coarse gold" was discovered by George Carmacks, an American, and two Indians, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie, on Rabbit Creek near Dawson City. Canadian Robert Henderson also found gold on the Klondike River side stream. By the time the shipments of gold reached Seattle and San Francisco, the greatest gold rush in history had begun.

It is estimated that over a million persons set out for the Klondike gold fields, but only about fifty thousand of them actually succeeded. The others had frozen to death, starved, become ill, or were discouraged and turned back. Those who made it, staked their claims up and down every river and tributary. By the looks of the area around Dawson City, not a stone went unturned. The place looks like a giant ant hill with clearing piles of sifted dirt and stones stacked up. Thirty electric-powered, hydraulic dredges turned over a hundred miles (160 km) of creek and river bed. They went to depths of sixty feet (18 m) below water level into the bedrock to reclaim gold on a commercial basis. Abandoned and rusting mining equipment can still be seen where they were left after the gold was taken.

d, abandoned gold dredges, such as this one at Dawson Creek, turned over hundreds of miles of creek and river bed in search of gold.



tried our luck at panning for gold only to find small specks; possibly a dime's worth! The icy and the back-breaking labor discouraged our or more of the yellow mineral.

tried to imagine the boom town of Dawson City 5,000 people at the time of its incorporation in and 40,000 at the height of the gold rush. Today, ghost town with 850 inhabitants trying to reclaim exciting history and to attract tourists.

W Dawson City is becoming a popular tourist town," and Mrs. Pauline Butterworth, a widow who was in Dawson City and who operates Butterworth's Goods Store. "People used to go directly to by way of the Alcan, but now they take the ke Loop to see us." Mrs. Butterworth and several of her friends have published the town's only sheet for over twenty-one years. They meet at other's homes to assemble the news and mimeograph. In addition to the townspeople, it has subscribers from as far away as England.

We were pleased to find the Palace Grand Theatre reopened. Ten years ago the Dawsonites were making plans to refurbish it for a National Historic Site. We sat directly over the stage in an old box seat while the cast produced "Gaslight Follies," a musical narrative of the Klondike.

Dawson City's boardwalks and dirt streets were once filled with elaborate hotels, dance halls with honky-tonk pianos, stores well-stocked with luxury items, hospitals, churches, show girls, chefs, and even dog mushers. The cargo came along with the fortune hunters. The large, steam-powered sternwheelers used wood for steam power. Trees were cut along the shore as the boat needed them. Dawson City was an exciting place during that golden era.

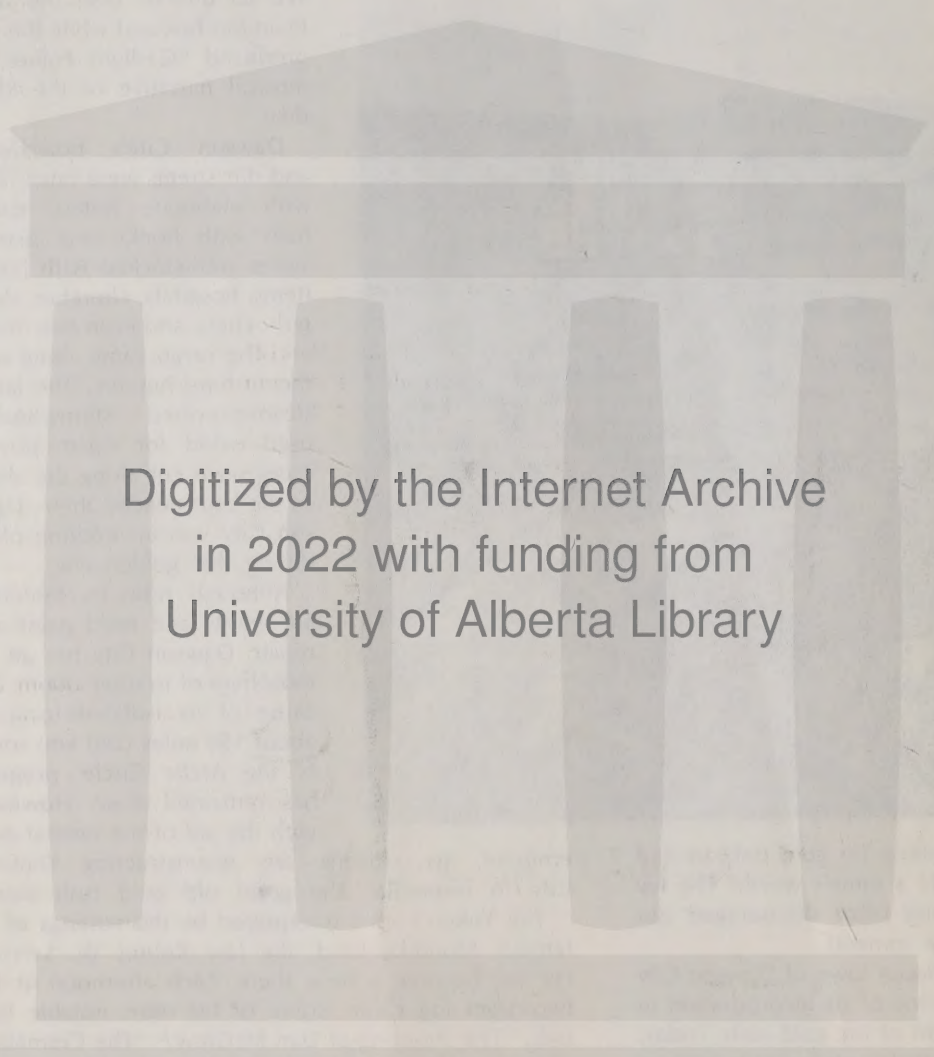
Although now its buildings are empty and need paint and repair, Dawson City has an atmosphere of frontier charm. Because of its isolated location, about 150 miles (240 km) south of the Arctic Circle, progress has remained slow. However, with the aid of the federal govern-

ment, its citizens are reconstructing Dawson City to resemble "the good old gold rush days."

The Yukon's spell is captured by the writings of its famous Klondike bard, the late Robert W. Service. He has become a hero there. Each afternoon at his two-room log cabin, some of his most notable ballads, "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," "The Cremation of Sam McGee," and "The Spell of the Yukon," are recited.

Campers experience that spell when they settle in one of the government campgrounds which are scattered throughout the Territory. An annual fee of \$10.00 per season or \$2.50 per day entitles the camper to any campground, with free firewood and neighbors from everywhere on the continent. These campgrounds were created as a fire protection of the dense forests after the opening of the Alaska Highway to public traveling in 1946.

From Dawson City, going west, we crossed the
continued on page 72



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Yukon

I remembered the high winds we encountered at Burwash Landing on our previous trip. The gusts blew the water right up from Kluane Lake. This time a calm, sunny day gave us a spectacular view of this 40-mile (64 km) stretch of very blue water.

In contrast is Whitehorse, the Territorial capital, with all the modern

Today, Whitehorse is a convention center for the Yukon and is a popular vacation spot. The *SS Klondike*, a historic sternwheeler, is open daily for public inspection. The MacBride Museum, Sam McGee's Cabin, and the Old Log Cabin Museum are other attractions where visitors can learn about the Yukon's past. Seven miles (eleven km) south of Whitehorse at Miles Canyon, an excursion boat cruises between crooked basalt walls.

We will return again to hear the howls of the Malemute, smell the cool Canadian air, see the radiant glow of fireweed—and feel the silence found only in the Yukon.—END

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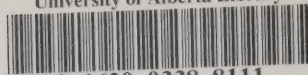
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